Chapter 10

Belonging, temporariness and seasonal labour: Working holidaymakers' experiences in regional Australia

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Introduction

The face of temporary migration in Australia has been slowly changing over time, and is increasingly being played out on a global stage. Labour and lifestyle mobility has long been embedded in certain aspects of indigenous life and in the Australian rural imaginary (Ahluwalia, 2001). The reality is not quite so romantic. The swagman made infamous in Banjo Paterson's *Waltzing Matilda* may have become an accidental folk hero and national symbol of 'backing the underdog', but the process of going on Walkabout in some aboriginal societies was reduced to "a signless void unorganised by pioneering purpose" by colonial powers (Wolfe, 1991, p. 121). Bands of migrant itinerant workers annually tracing a circuitous path that follows harvest trails (Hanson & Bell, 2007; Henderson, 2005) or indentured labour of the North Queensland sugar industry (Moraes-Gorecki, 1994; Saunders, 1982) have been replaced by the working holidaymaker supplementing travel with seasonal agricultural employment (Mares, 2016). Today, regional communities have become an unlikely backdrop where temporariness collides with identity, and gives rise to questions relating to vulnerability, emotional, and physical safety.

In response to continually shifting patterns of global labour migration, it is important to examine the impact of temporariness on the everyday lives of transient workers. This chapter begins by outlining the changing narratives of temporary migration in Australia,

focusing on the Working Holiday visa programme, and working holidaymakers. In Australia, national discourse surrounding temporary migrants is played out through media, and politics draw attention to the most recent iterations of labour mobility in regional areas. Unresolved debates over taxation (Steen & Peel, 2015) and a continuing stream of stories and government inquiries about workplace exploitation (Fair Work Ombudsman, 2016) create uncertain futures for working holidaymakers in the rural space. The section that follows situates working holidaymakers' lived experiences in the broader national context. The chapter then addresses structural vulnerability and examines how working holidaymakers' everyday lives are lived in marginal space. This section traces what it means to be invisible, and outline recent history of some of the violence experienced by working holidaymakers in Australia. The right to economic personhood then forms the basis of discussion and concludes the chapter.

The chapter relates to my doctoral research, which is an anthropological study that questions how working holidaymakers make sense of temporariness and feelings of belonging when employed in seasonal agricultural labour in regional Australia. Data collection in this study was based on approximately six months of immersive ethnographic fieldwork that took place in a regional town located in South East Queensland between March and September 2016. I used methods of participant observation and semi-structured interviews to speak with working holidaymakers, farmers, and more long-term residents living and working in the area.

The changing profile of temporary migration in Australia

Temporary work visas are created in response to genuine or manufactured skills and labour shortages in various industries. The recently abolished Temporary Work (Skilled) visa (subclass 457), the Seasonal Worker Programme, and the Working Holiday visa (subclass 417) are some of the most common arrangements for temporary work in Australia. The

Temporary Work visa linked skilled workers in various industries to sponsored employers for between two to four years, but was replaced in April 2017 by the Temporary Skills Shortage visa, which targets a much smaller list of occupations (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2017a). The Seasonal Worker Programme and similar past variations of the scheme connects skilled workers from Pacific Island nations and Timor-Leste to sponsored Australian employers predominantly in the horticulture industry (Dun & Klocker, 2017). This chapter will focus exclusively on the Working Holiday visa programme and the experiences of working holidaymakers. The Working Holiday visa allows a visa holder to stay in Australia for up to one year (Clarke, 2004). To apply for a second year, applicants must complete 88 days (roughly three months) work in specific industries; including plant and animal cultivation, fishing and pearling, tree farming and felling, mining, and construction (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2017b). The most recent report from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (2016, p. 36) indicates that there were a total of 135,282 first and second year visa holders in Australia last year. This visa is available to young people aged 18-30, who are not accompanied by any dependent children. Residents of 19 partner countries are permitted to apply; in December 2016, the largest numbers of working holidaymakers in Australia were from the United Kingdom, Germany, France, South Korea, and Taiwan (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2016, p. 21). While ‘backpacker’ is a common term used in Australia to refer to young international travellers, ‘working holidaymaker’ is used here to indicate the specific conditions that inform travel and employment for individuals holding a Working Holiday visa.

Since its inception in 1975, the Working Holiday visa has been intended to facilitate cultural exchange, while allowing the working holidaymaker to supplement their travel with incidental labour. Any employment counted towards a second-year visa application must be

undertaken in regional areas, and the working holidaymaker must not work for more than six months with a single employer (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2017b). Flexible work is preferable (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995), and many working holidaymakers seek out seasonal agricultural employment. This type of work is relatively easy to obtain and does not require prior experience. These expectations of cultural exchange and conditions stipulating limited periods of work have meant that the public perception of working holidaymakers is that of a carefree young person travelling across Australia. Images of the 'out of control' backpacker (Peel & Steen, 2007) and the traveller as an economic resource (Jarvis & Peel, 2013; Tan & Lester, 2012) permeate working holidaymakers' lives in tourist destination and employment centres.

The category 'working holidaymaker' comprises a broad range of individual experiences and identities. For temporary migrants such as working holidaymakers, these identities can shift and their transience can contrast with ideas surrounding migration that rely on fixity and stability in place (Robertson, 2016). Uriely (2001, p. 2) makes a distinction between "travelling workers" and "working tourists". Working tourists use employment to further travel, while travelling workers are more likely to be skilled professionals who view tourism as an additional activity (Uriely, 2001). While working holidaymakers in Australia are not expected to have any experience in seasonal agricultural labour prior to obtaining their Working Holiday visa, these categories can be useful in distinguishing between their diverse experiences. Working holidaymakers frequently blur the line between being a tourist doing incidental labour, and a more long-term employee going on short trips away.

Some working holidaymakers prefer to do their three months' worth of work as quickly as possible, before moving on to a new location and transitioning back into the role of tourist. Depending on variables including the availability of work, the likelihood of underemployment, difficulties surrounding paperwork, weather, and the success of the

harvest period, it can take much longer than three months for a working holidaymaker to meet the requirements of a second-year visa application**.** Others immediately seek out seasonal agricultural employment and work in Australia for the duration of their two-year stay. Li and Whitworth (2016, p. 145) identify how some working holidaymakers "disregard their visa conditions and ignore the rules pertaining to working the same job for another six months, or even buy a 'fake' second visa through unofficial means". This pattern of continuing work can also occur through legal methods: some working holidaymakers will work for six months, before finding a new job to last for six months, and so on, for the entire duration of their two year stay.

Many of the working holidaymakers I encountered had based themselves in the same regional area for between one and two years. They worked a series of jobs with different employers after the maximum six-month employment period. They lived in more permanent accommodation (shared houses as opposed to caravan parks and hostels), and often talked about enjoying the small-town lifestyle because it was easier to save money. They would take multiple short holidays during their stay, travelling to more typical tourist locations and capital cities for a weekend or an entire week before returning to work. I do not share this knowledge with the intention of implying this practice involves any wrongdoing, but to suggest that there is a disjuncture between the structure of the Working Holiday visa and actual practices. There is a certain amount of leeway in this system of temporary migration that allows visa holders to manipulate it to meet their own needs. But overall, the Working Holiday visa has transformed into a means of producing a guaranteed unskilled labour force, rather than an opportunity for cultural exchange.

Living in the margins

Working holidaymakers are habitually exposed to forms of structural vulnerability throughout their stays in Australia. This structural vulnerability can lead working

holidaymakers to become a hidden population that is not always visible or easy to assist. While working holidaymakers are consistently highlighted on a national political stage, it is easy to be blind to their everyday movements and practices. An inability to definitively keep track of a transient population, minimal engagement with receiving communities and more long-term residents, and often a lack of the necessary contextual knowledge required to navigate a geographical location or socioeconomic relationships all contributes to their invisibility in work locations. Underhill and Rimmer (2015, p. 2) refer to these contributing elements as part of a 'multi-layered vulnerability' that results in "differential degrees of disadvantage". Drawing on the concept of 'everyday violence'(Scheper-Hughes, 1993), I outline how institutional and symbolic processes can have debilitating effects on an individual's ability to practice everyday life. I use the phrase 'structural vulnerability', which manifests as increased exposure to risk and discomfort in a way that contributes to a lack of agency or physical and emotional safety for working holidaymakers.

What does it mean to belong?

Structural vulnerability resulting from the liminality of temporary migration effects workers' everyday lives and feelings of belonging or exclusion. In regional Australia, tensions arise where temporary migration intersects with ideas surrounding identity, belonging, and the rural imaginary. Working holidaymakers are part of a visibly different transient population that is largely disconnected from the wider community. While they contribute to local economies through seasonal agricultural work, they remain socially isolated. Temporary migrants lack the sense of belonging that is afforded through citizenship, despite that their everyday routines are likely to mirror those of more long-term residents as they move between employment and social activities (Allon & Anderson, 2010). Living and working in an area for even a short period of time involves the gradual acquisition of knowledge relative to individual needs, meaning that working holidaymakers participate

locally through the act of being in place (Allon, Anderson, & Bushell, 2008). Despite having everyday routines that are entrenched in place, working holidaymakers are not seen to belong because they are not actively putting down roots in the same way as more permanent migrants. Instead, they occupy an ambiguous status of being 'permanently temporary'. If working holidaymakers participate locally but are distanced from the wider community, then what does it mean to be local, or to belong? It is often assumed that belonging can only be fully realised through the passing of time, in addition to the gradual integration into regional social and economic structures and systems (Lippard, 1997).

In rural areas, the mobile body can contrast with a sense of regional identity that is categorised by stability (Lockie, 2000; Lockie & Bourke, 2001) and a deep, long-term personal connection to regional space. Regional identity is partially informed by inherent privilege and dominant whiteness that pervades national ideas of rurality (Dufty-Jones, 2014) and heightens visibility or invisibility and feelings of exclusion for non-white individuals (Forrest & Dunn, 2013). Working holidaymakers are both temporary and often visibly different. Temporariness in this sense is marked as a 'condition' or 'status' that conflates notions of connection, legitimacy and the authority to claim ownership over a space (Gustafson, 2009; Tomaney, 2013). This contributes to the marginalisation of transient groups such as working holidaymakers, who typically maintain far less claim over space than more long-term residents.

Working holidaymakers therefore challenge and disrupt dominant narratives surrounding what it means to belong. Bauman (2001) argues that a strong sense of community signifies a lack of freedom of movement; a weak sense of community is more fluid and permeable. Enclaves of working holidaymakers become self-sustaining networks that are centred on movement (Kravanja, 2016; Wilson & Richards, 2008). These communities act as a type of 'safety net' that meets a series of emotional and physical needs.

In work-based locations, communities of working holidaymakers are connected by shared experiences of employment and accommodation, to the exclusion of all others. These communities are minimally affected by constant arrivals and departures. Working holidaymakers share resources such as knowledge and material goods. In these seemingly idyllic enclaves, working holidaymakers experience little degree of difference. These communities also expand and contract at different times throughout a working holidaymaker's stay in Australia, depending on factors such as travel, location, and connectedness to others. However, there are very few ways for working holidaymakers to access more formal networks that can help alleviate the effect of structural vulnerabilities.

In the agriculture-rich area where my study took place, I observed few working holidaymakers who interacted socially with long-term residents in the wider community. Most interactions between these two groups were functional and centred around the exchange of goods and services, in instances such as grocery shopping, employment, or accommodation. Cultural exchange was an important element of their experiences while they were employed in seasonal agricultural employment, but these interactions primarily took place between working holidaymakers from diverse countries, rather than with Australian residents. In regional areas, working holidaymakers' status as an economic resources results in limited social interactions with the broader community, further positioning them as an isolated population.

The right to economic personhood

Spending time in regional areas and participating in seasonal agricultural labour involves a stark shift in identity from tourist to worker. Employment is central to working holidaymakers' everyday lives when they are living in work-based locations (Jarvis & Peel, 2013). It is becoming increasingly unclear whether the intended purpose of the Working

Holiday visa is aligned with the actual experiences of working holidaymakers (Mares, 2016; Reilly, 2015).

It is also difficult to determine whether the perceived skills shortages the Working Holiday visas are intended to address are real or manufactured. In regional areas, working holidaymakers are a continuing source of agricultural labour that is not met through other means. The continued outmigration of rural youth due to employment and educational opportunities is also thought to significantly contribute to labour shortages (Alston, 2004; Leyshon, 2008). Few Australian permanent residents take up employment in seasonal agricultural labour, as there is little perceived benefit for individuals seeking more permanent employment to take up seasonal agricultural labour (Tan & Lester, 2012). Working holidaymakers have a greater incentive to take up seasonal agricultural labour than Australian residents, as they need to obtain the required number of days' work to be eligible to apply for a second-year Working Holiday visa. While the presence of working holidaymakers does not actively contribute to localised unemployment, systems of temporary migration in Australia create an already transient population that can be funnelled into flexible work arrangements. Dufty-Jones (2014, p. 372) argues that "the increased reliance on immigrant labour by rural economies is argued to be the outcome of socially regulated employment relations", rather than being the product of genuine labour shortages.

The process of obtaining seasonal agricultural labour is not significantly impacted by continual streams of arrivals and departures of working holidaymakers, who are often quick to move on to a new location. Reciprocal exchange means that farms have a guaranteed source of labour, while working holidaymakers are able to earn money and meet the requirements of a second-year Working Holiday visa application. A focus on labour, rather than an individual's experience means that working holidaymakers become an expendable economic resource. In the course of my research, one long-term resident recounted how she

thought that working holidaymakers were ‘definitely here [in the regional area] for work; a commodity’. The economic personhood of working holidaymakers is detached from the ‘unskilled’ labour they provide. In fact, seasonal agricultural labour is intricate and intensive; workers perform complex learned hand movements as they pick, pack, or sort various types of produce. Crop seasonality creates strict schedules, and farmers are left to hastily arrange or dissolve labour forces as required. In these contexts, who does the work is often of lesser importance than the speed to which harvesting is completed.

Working holidaymakers are an already isolated population. As they are not seen to be in regional areas for reasons other than finding work, they become further distanced from the wider community. As a transient group of people, working holidaymakers are not thought to have any kind of connection to the receiving location outside of casual employment, meaning that there is little incentive for social interactions between working holidaymakers and long-term residents. Working holidaymakers are only seen to participate in regional communities in an economic sense, resulting in an ‘economic blindness’ that has implications for physical and emotional safety. Linking labour practices to personhood, citizenship, and structural vulnerability highlights how the above issues sprawl beyond workspaces and into the minutiae of their everyday life.

Encountering everyday risk

Working holidaymakers encounter differential degrees of risk in their everyday life due to structural vulnerability and invisibility while in Australia. Risk can be more benign and include engagement in behaviours viewed as disruptive, such as drinking and noise complaints (Botterill et al., 2016), or be more systemic and unable to be managed by working holidaymakers themselves. In this instance, exposure to risk manifests itself as a build-up of everyday disadvantage. A lack of social interactions with people in the receiving location

(Reichenberger, 2016), minimal awareness of formal support networks or rights (Fair Work Ombudsman, 2016), or a lack of location-specific knowledge that can assist in avoiding disadvantage all contribute to a greater likelihood of exposure to risk. As some examples, working holidaymakers may not have accommodation or employment organised before arriving in a new location, or they may not be familiar with employers in the area. In rural employment centres, this could mean that a working holidaymaker without such knowledge could find themselves working for a disreputable employer, or 'locked in' to substandard accommodation. Substandard accommodation, underpayment, and workplace exploitation are common experiences had by working holidaymakers in Australia.

There is widespread concern that sharing negative stories could have an effect on the Australian tourism industry, or otherwise suggest that a "collusion of denial" by tourist operators allows varying forms of violence to occur (Botterill et al., 2016, p. 201). Peel and Steen (2007) suggest that it is counterproductive to the tourism industry to paint working holidaymakers as likely to experience disadvantage or be victims of crime. It is assumed that sharing working holidaymakers' bad experiences is detrimental to tourism, giving the impression that Australia is an unsafe location for both working and holidaying (Mercer, 2017; Urban & Michael, 2017), subsequently reducing working holidaymakers' significant contribution to the national economy. However, it is important to acknowledge the conditions that contribute to an environment where structural violence and legitimate risk against working holidaymakers can occur. A more humanistic understanding of working holidaymakers' presence in Australia that extends beyond their perceived economic value could create room for applied discourse that actively works towards mitigating everyday risk and violence. When working holidaymakers are only seen to be valuable in an economic sense, they become a permanent underclass of people.

A carefree attitude and assumed naivety resulting from a lack of appropriate contextual cultural knowledge does not account for working holidaymakers' increased likelihood of exposure to risk in everyday life. Like other temporary migrants, working holidaymakers have minimal access to the safety nets associated with citizenship (Rajkumar, Berkowitz, Vosko, Preston, & Latham, 2012), and are forced to accept 'survival jobs' (see Reid et al., 2014) that involve conditions they would not be exposed to or tolerate in their home countries. As a transient population, working holidaymakers have minimal linkages to anyone outside of their own communities or enclaves (see Schmid, 2008), with external connections mostly fleeting and based on transactional relationships. Working holidaymakers quickly move between the roles of 'travelling worker' and 'working tourist'; these shifting roles are embedded into their identities, and are expressed through everyday patterns of mobility and in their social and economic practices.

While many working holidaymakers do situate themselves in a single location for an extended length of time, it is generally understood that because of the conditions stipulated in the Working Holiday visa that they will inevitably *move on*. 'Passing through', even on a more long-term basis, means that being a working holidaymaker is an ephemeral state. As Roberts (2016, p. 15) writes, "in geographical terms, then, the intersection of violence and travel is one that is at its most fraught and uncertain when enacted in the in-between spaces of travel and transit". A permanent sense of 'in-between-ness' in combination with the fluidity of identity perpetuates a state where working holidaymakers are subject to everyday structural vulnerability and physical risk, but the individual has little opportunity to improve on the less desirable elements of their situation. Drawing from Douglas (1970, p. 117), "if a person has no place in the social system and is therefore a marginal being, all precaution against danger must come from others. [He] cannot help [his] abnormal situation". Any work

done to alleviate the effects of structural vulnerability and risk that is associated with temporariness needs to be done through external means.

Conclusion

Temporary labour populations, including working holidaymakers are integral to the maintenance of industries such as agriculture in Australia. There is a reciprocal relationship between working holidaymakers and regional Australian communities. However, working holidaymakers' everyday lives in rural space are impacted by restrictions that stem from specific conditions attached to temporary visas. Temporariness means that working holidaymakers are often more susceptible to forms of structural vulnerability, while also not having the means to connect to formal authority in order to mitigate exposure to risk. 'Claiming ownership' over space is difficult when working holidaymakers' everyday lives are restricted to marginal spaces and they are unable to find work that is not insecure and undervalued. While all these factors come together to create a liminal regional space that is socially and economically isolated, transient labour also creates rich, hidden communities in unexpected places. Regional areas become enclaves for working holidaymakers away from tourist centres. These locations are more often discussed in relation to issues such as labour exploitation, but they also provide key sites in which to examine how temporariness, mobility, and belonging impact everyday life and give rise to a unique and shifting labour population.

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